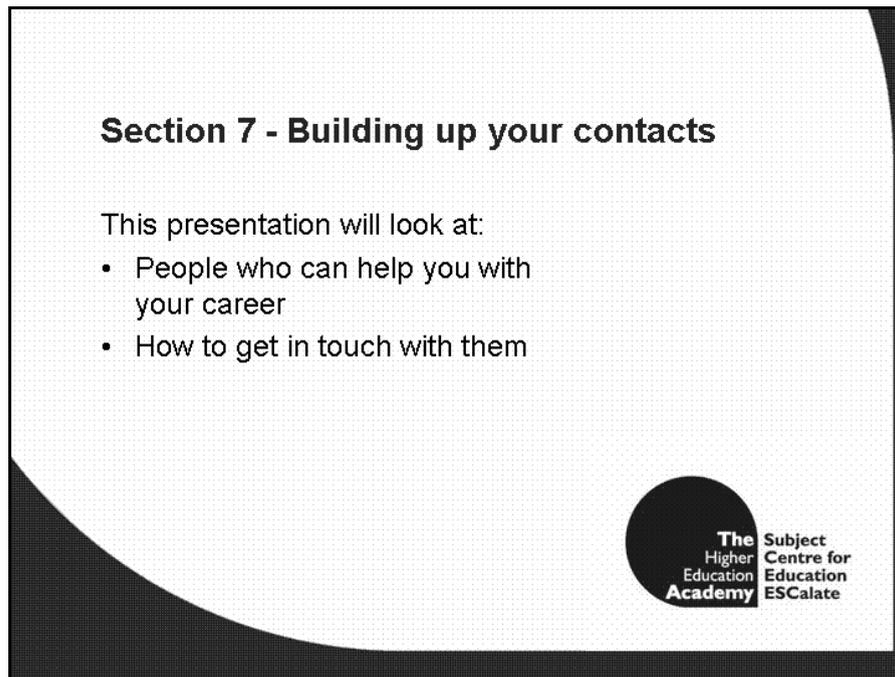
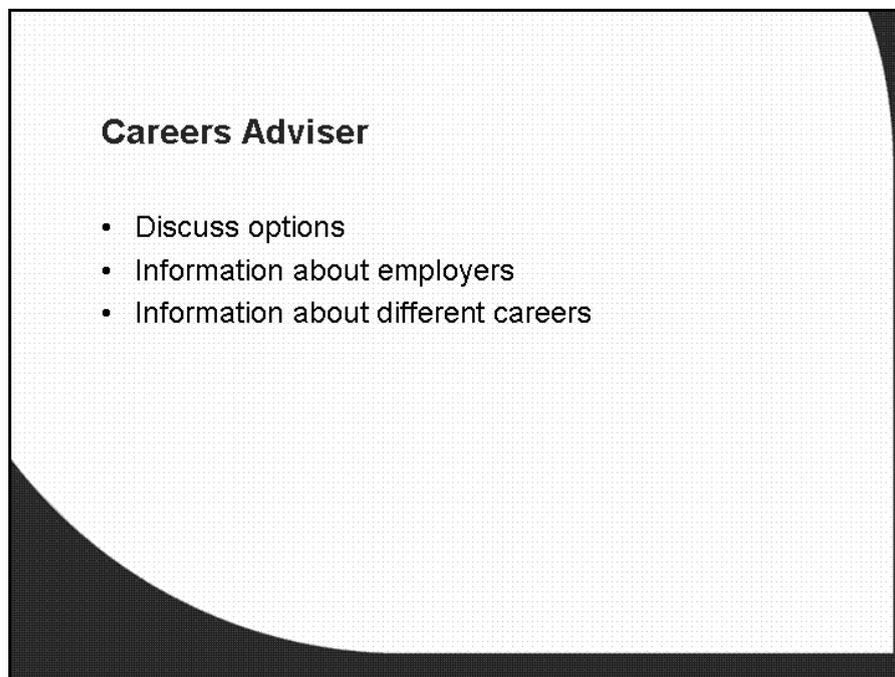


Section 7 - Building up your contacts presentation



Building up contacts and networking is a valuable way to find out more information about a company or a career path. Being able to speak to someone who has actually done the job that you are interested in may reveal that it would be ideal for you or that it wouldn't suit you at all. Also, if you are interested in a specific company, then your contact may be able to let you know of any vacancies that are coming up that might not get advertised.

This presentation will look at who you should be getting in touch with, how you should contact them, and how they may be able to help you.

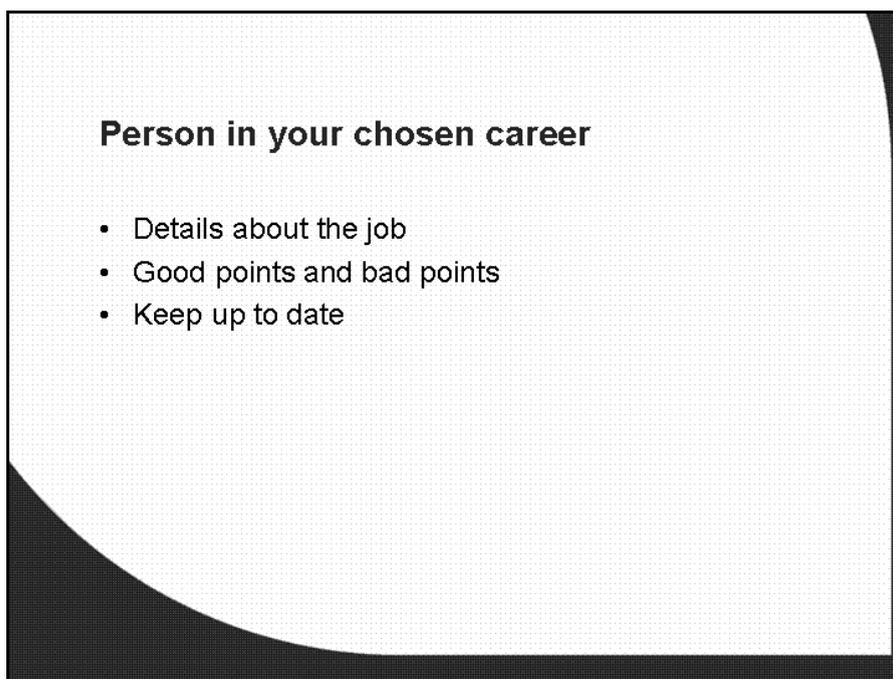


Having an appointment with a careers adviser is the best first step to take, if possible. Your careers adviser will be able to look at your educational background and your likes and dislikes and suggest some occupational areas that might interest you. Alternatively, if you already have a good idea about what you want to do they can advise on the best way to get into your chosen profession and help you work out if it would really suit you.

Aside from the information that the careers adviser can give you, there is also the option to do some research in the careers information room.

Your careers service will have folders of information on various graduate employers for you to look at. They will also have folders of information relating to all kinds of different careers. There should also be a large selection of prospectuses from other universities for postgraduate courses. Your careers service may also collect data from students about the format of interviews and assessment centres for various employers, which can come in very handy before an interview.

Your careers service will also produce bulletins on new vacancies so you should ensure that you get signed up to receive these or drop in on a regular basis to collect them.



If you have already decided what kind of job you want then it is very useful to speak to someone who is already employed in that profession. Job descriptions give some details about what a job entails, but by speaking to someone in role you can find out exactly what the job involves on a day to day basis.

Your contact can tell you about the good and bad points to the job, so you can decide if one outweighs the other and if the job still sounds as if it would be suitable for you.

Having a contact already in the profession can help you with keeping up with the latest developments in that field. For example, if there a piece of software that is used in the job - which version do you need to know about?

Person employed by your chosen company

- Information about the company
- Atmosphere and conditions
- Stability/plans for growth
- New vacancies

It might be that you have a specific company in mind that you would like to work for. Perhaps you admire their product line, or the way they do business, and you'd be prepared to take any suitable job that they had to offer you.

In this case it would be helpful to have a contact who is already in the organisation. This kind of contact would be able to let you know if working for the company is as good as you imagine. They would be able to provide you with information about the company that you could then use to demonstrate your enthusiasm at interview.

They would also be able to give you an idea of the working atmosphere - is everyone a team-player working for the greater good, or is there a lot of back-biting and competition between employees? Does the company look after its staff properly?

Another vital piece of information is the stability of the company. A person on the inside may have a fair idea of how well the company is doing, and whether it plans to expand any of its departments in the future, or even if some areas are under threat. Bear in mind though, that some companies keep this kind of information very quiet, so even a long-standing employee may not be aware of what is happening behind the scenes.

An inside contact is ideally placed to provide you with information on up-and-coming vacancies. They might know someone who has just handed in their notice, giving you the ideal opportunity to fire off a speculative application before the job is advertised, or they may be aware of expanding areas that need new staff.

Even if there are no vacancies available, your contact may be able to assist you in obtaining a work placement in order to gain some experience.

Making contacts

- Family members
- Friends and university colleagues
- Lecturers
- Professional associations
- Contact the company

How do you make contacts?

First of all, investigate your immediate family. Do any of your relatives work in an area that interests you? If they have any friends who work in that area, ask them to introduce you.

Your friends may already be in the workplace or still at university, either way, they may have relevant family members that they could put you in touch with if you ask nicely.

Some lecturers have had work experience in 'the outside world' before entering lecturing. If you plan to stay in your subject area, try asking around your department to see if any of them can help you. You may find that an engineering lecturer, for example, spent 2 years in an engineering firm before starting to teach.

Professional associations can also be useful. Look at the association and trade magazines. If you find an article that interests you, contact the writer. Perhaps think about contributing something yourself. Get yourself known.

If you have a specific company in mind, get in touch with them. Ask them if you can drop in for a chat about the possible career options available there. Perhaps you could arrange a week or two of work experience or work shadowing which would allow you to meet potential contacts and also see what the company and the work is like.

Quid Pro Quo

What can you offer in return:

- Enthusiasm
- Thanks
- Reciprocation

Although your contacts can be a great deal of use to you, it is important that you do not take their help for granted.

A bit of appreciation goes a long way. Your contact may have to put themselves out to find out the information that you need, and so they need to feel that you appreciate their efforts. If your contact sees that you are very enthusiastic about joining their profession and feels that you are respecting them as a member of that profession, then they are going to be happy to help you.

However, if you take all the info you can get and never speak to them again, they will feel used and may not help anyone in the same way again.

If the information they give you helps you to make up your mind about your career or helps you to secure your first post, then make sure that you thank your contact.

You should make it clear to your contact that you are prepared to help them just as much as they have helped you. It may be that they have a friend or relative you can help once you are a few years into your career.

Next steps

- Identify a job or company of interest
- Find out more
- Locate a contact

What are the next steps?

First of all, you need to decide on a career sector or company that interests you, most likely through having a careers appointment. From there you can then research the occupations (see section 8) and then choose your company or specific role. Next you need to find a contact. Before you start asking your questions, make sure that you have really thought them out, so that your contact can see that you are committed to finding out more.

By using networking you should be able to find the kind of job that suits you.